Since 1947: Partition Narratives among Punjabi Migrants of Delhi
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Studies of Indian film have thus far focused almost exclusively on the Hindi-language Bollywood industry, and Jacob offers a cogent reminder of why it is so important to look at the regional industries. These cinemas are able to cater to local tastes and tolerances and refer to specific insider issues, often through visual signifiers. Jacob’s work is one of the few to consider the regional peculiarities of Tamil cinema, an established industry that has been producing around 160 films per year since the 1980s. Tamil films are increasing in popularity nationwide, and this industry, Jacob points out, is currently in its heyday “in monetary terms and in the currencies of innovation and accomplishment” (p. 103), with the most advanced film studios in the country and more employees than the Bombay-based industry.

A primary contribution of *Celluloid Deities* is its analysis of the different types of spectatorship involved in consuming films and banners and cutouts, and the way in which “image managers” work to control the information contained in them. That is, what viewers perceive from symbolic content, juxtaposition with other imagery, references to ideology, mythology, local history, and contemporary events is carefully managed to blur boundaries between the filmic and personal lives of celebrities.

One of the most exciting things about Jacob’s study of the hand-painted banner and cutout industry is that it is gratifyingly comprehensive. She combines close, art history–style readings of individual banners and advertising campaigns (for both films and elections) with historical and ethnographic accounts of the industry from the perspectives of artists; financiers such as S. S. Vasan, the “king of publicity,” whose Gemini Pictures set the trend for spectacular advertising that characterizes the Tamil film industry; and the public. Her careful consideration of the history, content, and contextual significance of the banner industry’s cinematic and political imagery offers a complex and nuanced insight into the social, political, and religious contexts of the images that will prove valuable to a wide variety of scholars.

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*Since 1947* is an ambitious and insightful examination of Punjabi migrant life in Delhi from the time of partition to the end of resettlement in 1965. Undoubtedly, “partition” has come to be a ubiquitous theme in modern Punjab studies. To this extent, Ravinder Kaur’s work lies on well-trodden ground. It is Kaur’s focus
on the complex web of narrative by surviving Punjabi migrants, however, that sets her work apart. *Since 1947* fills a discernable gap in modern Punjabi studies.

*Since 1947* presents a thematic organization of the subject rather than a historical rehearsal of the period. Indeed, this approach reflects the core of the present study: to call into question the established and accepted master narrative of “the partition experience” of Punjabi migrants. The introductory chapter, “Narrating Everyday Forms of the Past,” situates the present study and lays much of the theoretical and methodological groundwork for the remainder of the volume.

Chapter 2, “State and Community in the Narratives of Displacement,” investigates the effect of partition on community networks and the de-/re-construction of community boundaries. Kaur readily and rightly acknowledges that communities take new forms, but she problematizes the remaking of communities among Punjabi migrants in terms of omission. She asks, why are the extrapersonal contributions of the state absent from personal narratives of displacement? In answering this question, Kaur pursues two threads of analysis: “one, to prop up the state as the principal organizer in the Partition resettlement process, and, two, to follow the absence of the state in personal narratives publicly and privately told by the survivors” (p. 42).

Drawing on the work of Paul Virilo, chapter 3, “The Last Journey: Exploring Social Class in Partition Migration,” explores the intersection of “speed” and social class in partition narratives. Here, Kaur’s analysis is astute and insightful as she delineates how the means by which partition’s migrants arrived in Delhi (on foot, by train, in the air) inform the migrant’s understanding of the past and with their place in the new Indian state. The issues of class and caste are likewise taken up in Kaur’s treatment of “untouchable” migrants of partition in chapter 6. This is one of the highlights of the present volume, and perhaps the most methodologically challenging. In “Missing Fields: The ‘Untouchable’ Migrants of Partition,” Kaur locates untouchable refugees in Delhi and attempts to reconstruct their story of partition migration, a story that has hitherto been largely unwritten.

“Governmental Policies and Practices of Resettlement” (chapter 4) is explicitly postcolonial in its analysis. Kaur argues that the “state was not alone in … nation building” because migrants themselves were actively engaged in this process (p. 85). “Restoration of Loss,” as the title of the fifth chapter suggests, deals with the recurring themes of loss and restoration in partition narratives. Kaur draws attention to the multiple levels on which loss has been experienced by Punjabi migrants, and the subsequent complexity of attempts at restoration.

In “Claims of Locality: At Home in Delhi” (chapter 7), Kaur makes a persuasive case that the widely (master-) narrated “parent–child” model for understanding the relationship between partitions’ migrants to Delhi and the Indian state is too simplistic. Casting refugees “as their own agents,” Kaur, through migrants’ letters, newspapers, and personal interviews, makes real the affectively charged complexities of the refugee—state relationship.

Chapter 8, “Ethnic Amnesia: Identity Making among Punjabi Hindus,” sketches that complexities of ethnic identification among Punjabi migrants in
Delhi. Kaur argues that “Punjabi Hindus ... identification with the Indian nation-state has become inextricably deeper that that among their Sikh counterparts” (p. 217). Unlike Punjabi Sikhs, Kaur suggests that Punjabi Hindu survivors of partition have “delinked” themselves from their Punjabi ethnicity and that their identity has been reworked not into “being ‘Hindu’ in a religious sense,” but into a “nationalized context of being a patriotic Indian” (p. 217). The book concludes with “A Community Narrative,” offering a summary of the book’s argument, as well as a reflective commentary on the Lajpat Nagar community/district of Delhi at 2002.

Kaur has produced a theoretically broad and well-grounded volume. She draws on theorists from a variety of disciplines—postcolonial studies, women’s studies, psychology, narrative theory—and locates her own work clearly in relation to others in the field. Her conceptual categories are carefully nuanced, and she engages in critical discussion of problematic terms (e.g. state, community, narrative, discourse, migrant, refugee, etc.) where appropriate. Moreover, Kaur’s ethnographic fieldwork breaks new and exciting ground in the area of Punjab studies. Since 1947 is a welcome addition to a growing body of subaltern scholarship relating to South Asia. This book is sure to be of interest to those working in the areas of oral and narrative history, migration studies, sociology, gender studies, or ethnography.

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Xenophobia in Seventeenth-Century India is a revised version of the author’s doctoral dissertation, submitted in 2008 at Leiden University. The dissertation’s title, “Xenophobia and Consciousness in Seventeenth-Century India: Six Cases from the Deccan,” represents a much fairer indication of the book’s contents than does its published title. Although the representation in precolonial India of a feared “other” (European as well as Indian), and the underlying enmities that derive from the ascription of “otherness,” are prominent themes in this study, looming just as large in the work as a whole is Gijs Kruijtzer’s delving into the questions of agency, self-consciousness, and, ultimately, the notion of identity in precolonial India (hence the original title: Xenophobia and Consciousness). Here, Kruijtzer seeks to combat what he describes as a pervasive trend among scholars during the last thirty years to see “early modern identities ... as less than modern identities: less intense, less well demarcated, of a lesser scale, mere event rather than system or mere ideology without practice” (p. 256).